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## ABSTRACT

The Institute for Development of Educational Activities' Principal Inservice Program aims to help principals become more competent. The two-year program uses facilitators who work with groups of six to ten principals so that each can achieve four goals: (1) to carry out a project in personal professional development; (2) to implement a school improvement project in their schools that includes staff involvement; (3) to assist and encourage other group members in their two personal and school projects; and (4) to commit themselves to continuous personal improvement in their profession. Data from a survey of 245 principals who began the program in 1980 reveal wide ranges in their years of experience and the size of their schools, but indicate that they agree on several important issues. The respondents are shown to be satisfied with their careers and with their role as educational leaders but dissatisfied with the number of their problems, their lack of time to improve instructional programs, and their personal loneliness. They feel that success with students and staff is the most important aspect of the principalship and that schools must improve in meeting students' needs and involving parents in the educational process.  
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Improving School Practices Through Principals' Inservice  
James LaPlant

We have three objectives for this session. First, I will share some basic concepts which are a part of the Principals' Inservice Program. Second, I will share data which causes me to feel that the principal has been overlooked as a potential positive force in the improvement of school programs. I will take approximately thirty minutes to do this. Then, we also have Dr. Gerald Prince of the Worthington School System who took part in the program in Colorado Springs, Colorado and Dr. Harold Rowe from the Westerville School System who will explain their participation in the program and share with you their perceptions about what happens when people engage in this inservice program.

The /I/D/E/A/ Principals' Inservice Program had its start in the 1978-79 school year when three pilot groups of principals representing urban, rural, and suburban school systems engaged in a five month pilot program which tested out many of the activities that eventually were included in the program. In 1979-80, we had 14 people trained as facilitators who operated in ten sites with a total of 190 principals. My job as program developer was to observe each group at least once and I observed two groups every time they met. The purpose of that monitoring was to modify the materials based upon observations. In 1980-81, we trained 40 facilitators who are operating in 40 sites with 500 principals engaged in the first year of the field test of the project. Seven of the ten sites that started in 1979 continued into the second year.

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I have shared some handout material with you which gives you an overview of the program. Let me point to some particular ideas which are essential to understand the Principals' Inservice Program. First of all, it is important to recognize that we are assuming that the school is the unit of change in the educational system. We are also assuming that the principal should be a prime mover in the school improvement process. Another assumption is that a quality school is one in which all people--administrators, teachers, staff as well as students are continually learning and improving. Therefore, the intent was to develop a program which would help principals improve their professional competencies so that they can, in turn, improve school programs for students. Also, the program would not duplicate traditional inservice formats and it would be conducted locally over an extended period of time. The program was to complement other staff inservice programs of inservice programs offered by professional associations, state departments, and universities.

The program is a two-year program which focuses on four outcomes. The first outcome is personal professional development, where we ask each principal, as a member of a collegial support group, to design implement and evaluate a personal professional development plan to increase his or her leadership capability. The second outcome is that the principal will design, implement and evaluate a school improvement project which includes staff involvement in addressing an identified need within the school. The third outcome, is that the collegial support group will provide assistance and encouragement to each other as the principals in the group engage in personal professional development and school improvement efforts. This collegial support group outcome is one of the things that principals report they enjoy most. Let me make a statement about that concept. The collegial support group is a group of six to ten principals who meet with a trained facilitator at least once a month to engage in activities designed to move them toward the development of the four outcomes. The group also shares concerns

and gives participants some immediate help on problems that they are facing. We do this through the in-basket problem solving process and there is a handout in your packet describing that technique. The fourth outcome of the program is that the principal adopts continuous improvement as a way of life and accepts personal responsibility for his or her role in that improvement process. At this point please turn to the page that says "assumptions check." You can get the flavor of the program by looking at these ten statements and marking the assumptions checklist as to whether you agree or disagree or are unsure about the particular statements. I am going to stop talking for a short time while you actually take that checklist and check where you are with regard to those statements. (At this point there was a pause and people took time to read the ten statements and check their agreement or disagreement with each of the assumptions.)

The degree to which you agree with the assumptions listed would be an indication of whether or not this program would fit your needs. If you had serious disagreement with more than two or three of the statements, then I would suggest that the program probably would not meet your needs. In case you are interested in exploring possible involvement in this program further, the next page identifies the next steps to be pursued. What we are suggesting is that if you think you are interested, discuss the idea with some other principals and your school district administrators to get approval to begin to engage in the process. It would require that the group and the school district identify a prospective facilitator who would undergo a two week /I/D/E/A/ training session. Since we are moving into a self support phase of the project, there is a training fee this year as well as a fee to cover the cost of reproducing the materials. The reason for this is that /I/D/E/A/ and the Kettering Foundation are developmental organizations and we are in the process of moving the project from a development stage to a dissemination stage. As we do this, the dissemination activities will be taken over by the Center for Administrator Inservice at the University of

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Cincinnati and therefore all of our training sessions need to be self supporting.

The other item that you have in your packet that you may want to take time to look at further are the expanded explanations of each of the four outcomes; these are the first pages of the outcome guides from the inservice materials.

There is also a description of the facilitator training sessions for the summer of 1981. The six learner objectives for the facilitator training sessions spell out in rather definite terms exactly what kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes the facilitator will achieve during the two weeks. The final thing is a registration form in case you are interested in becoming a facilitator.

#### Participants

The second task was to share some data which we have collected from the principals who are participating this year. These data were collected from the 1980-81 group of principals at the beginning of their program. There were approximately 500 principals to whom we sent the questionnaires and at the point when we ran it through the computer, we had 245 responses. As we look at the number of years in administration, the principals participating this year represent the entire range of experience and type of school. We have a number of people who were first year principals and approximately a third of the people who have less than five years experience. On the other end of the scale we have about one fifth of the principals who have over fifteen years in their present position. The principals represent schools of all different sizes. We have principals from very small schools with staffs of 10 or under and less than 300 pupils and we have a good representation of schools who have thirty to sixty staff members. We also have some 21 schools represented who have over 60 staff members and over 2500 students. So, in general, the principals appear to represent all kinds of schools. Over ninety percent of the principals reporting have no teaching responsibilities and less

than a third of them have an assistant principal. They head elementary schools K-6, middle schools, grades 5 through 8 or some portion thereof and high schools. One interesting point was that more than one third of the principals reported that their school had some unique characteristic such as team teaching, an alternative school, non-graded or IGE, etc.

#### Satisfaction with Principalship

When we look at the principals' responses to a series of statements asking about their satisfaction with the principalship, there were a couple of ideas that emerge. First, the principals are very positive about their selection of the principalship as a career; more than 80% of the principals felt that their position was personally satisfying; they felt that they were the educational leader of the school, and they felt that they had an excellent opportunity to expand their leadership skills. They felt they could continue to learn and improve themselves as people and as principals. Further, 80% of them said if they had it to do all over again that they would probably choose to become a principal and that the problems of the job were really challenges that can become opportunities. In summary, contrary to some characterizations of the principals as being people who are very negative and do not see themselves as being responsible for leadership in the school, these principals appear to be saying that they are positive and they see themselves as having some responsibility for leadership.

There was another set of statements on which principals were divided. My interpretation at this point is that these issues suggest some problem areas that need to be looked at further. The issues where there was a division of thought were such things as too many problems get in the way of my being more effective. Another was that the job doesn't provide enough time to be concerned with improving the instructional program. A third item was that the principal's position is a busy one; however, it is very lonely. I want you to note that those three items relate to the four objectives that I mentioned before. The loneliness we hope will be

remedied through the collegial support outcome; the problems would relate to an activity in the collegial support group, namely the in-basket problem solving; and not having enough time to be concerned about the instructional program is exactly the problem we are trying to address in the school improvement project.

#### Perception of Job

We ask the principals to indicate the most positive aspects regarding their job, the most important job aspects in priority order, and the least important job aspects. We did some coding of their responses and at this time we can report that principals see the success with staff, and success with students as being the most positive aspect of the principalship. They also saw those two kinds of job aspects as being the most important. Running a poor third was success with school programs and curriculum; less than half of the principals indicated this as being a positive aspect. Success with parents and community ran fourth. In terms of the most important job aspects, working with staff and working with students were first and second, and a very poor third was working on curriculum or program improvements. On the other side of the coin, the least important aspect reported by principals involved doing paperwork.

When principals were asked the reasons why they took part in the Principals' Inservice Program, 79% of them said to improve professional knowledge and about 80% of them said to share problems with colleagues. In connection with my previous comments about improving school programs, only 22% of them reported that this was the reason why they took part in the inservice program.

Earlier, I suggested that the principals saw their job as busy but lonely. We ask them to whom they go to when they want advice about a particular problem. It is interesting that most of the time they go to someone in their school; central administrative persons were consulted by only 16% and other principals were mentioned by 18% of the principals.

### Views of Education

We ask a series of questions about the principals' opinion regarding the current state of education and the future prospects. Principals feel strongly that schools can develop more effective means for meeting the needs of students; they felt they could increase their potential to improve their schools; and they also felt that a successful school had to include active participation of the parents in the education of the children. There was disagreement on whether or not schools were doing as well as they could under current conditions and there was disagreement whether or not schools would become even more standardized in their operation in the future. Let me summarize what I am gleaning from this first glance at these data. I emphasize it is the first glance because we are still receiving data sheets from additional principals which will be added to this group analysis and that further analysis will allow us to make more definitive statements. The summary statement, that we have been overlooking the prospects that are inherent in the principalship for the improvement of school programs. We tend to fall into the trap of thinking of the principal as an "harried" person who is not interested in school improvement. These data would suggest the opposite. The principal is very positive and accepts the responsibility for school improvement and that we need to find more effective ways of helping that person achieve school improvement.

At this point, I introduced Gerald Prince and then later Harold Rowe. Dr. Prince shared with the group his experience of operating six collegial groups in the Colorado Springs School System. Dr. Rowe shared his experience in Westerville where they have two groups of principals who have engaged in the Principals' Inservice Program. Also, Hal Rowe facilitated his own immediate group of colleagues in a variation of the project which caused them to look at their own professional development and the educational improvement process within the Westerville City Schools.